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ABSTRACT

As early as the sixth century B.C., China's imperial library served as a depository of national literature and archives, and in 1905 China's first public library was opened. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, however, library development has been sporadic. Brief examinations of some of China's major libraries reveal the status, prospects, and problems of university and research libraries in China today. The National Library of China (NLC), the nation's largest public library, for example, collects comprehensively on a national scale and acquires foreign materials in 115 languages; however, the library faces an acute shortage of qualified personnel. Comparatively well-staffed and heavily used, academic libraries vary in size and services but face some common problems such as space and budget limitations and book preservation. Finally, special libraries, the best-managed libraries in China, have larger budgets than college and university libraries and are considered key national institutions. Despite the setbacks suffered during the Cultural Revolutions (1966-1976), China's libraries have experienced positive growth in the decade following the upheaval, and it is hoped that even greater emphasis will be placed on the expansion, improvement, and development of library work in the future. Fourteen references are provided. (KM)

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UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES IN CHINA

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FOREWORD

In recent years, as the People's Republic of China has become more open to the West, there has been a significant increase in the opportunities for foreigners, including American graduate students and postdoctoral scholars, to study and carry out research in China. Those whose research activities rely heavily upon China's library resources have had to adjust to the "reality" of the organization and management of China's libraries--which is quite different from American university and research libraries.

Shauley Cheng, a research librarian at Rutgers University of the State University of New Jersey, has had the unique opportunity to meet with library officials, staff, and personnel in a number of China's leading libraries. This Occasional Paper provides a brief historical overview of library development in China, the current organization and management of libraries in the People's Republic of China, and the prospects and problems of university and research libraries in contemporary China.

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UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES IN CHINA

Introduction

The intent of this report is first to provide a brief overview of library development in China and then to discuss the current status, prospects and problems of university and research libraries in China today.

History

The history of libraries in China is almost as old as the history of China itself. There was an imperial library as early as the sixth century B.C. Each successive dynasty had an imperial library which served as a depository of national literature and archives; it was reserved for use by the imperial family, high officials and scholars.

During the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties, the libraries of the Imperial Academy and the State Colleges of several provinces began to open their doors to students. In the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Qian Long (1736-1795) ordered that seven manuscript copies be made of the several thousand volumes that made up China's most important collection of books at the time, known as the "Si Ku Quan Shu," ("The Complete Set of the Four Libraries"). These copies were stored in specially built libraries located in the country's important educational and cultural centers. There were also numerous private family and monastic libraries which were opened to students under certain conditions. Again, libraries during this period functioned as depositories of

valuable historical records rather than as centers that were freely accessible to all.

After the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 and the Boxer Rebellion of 1900-01, leaders in China began to realize that the education of the common people was of basic importance to the foundation of a strong nation. They introduced proposals for a new educational system and for a system of public libraries and museums. The plan called for a library to be built in Peking and in each provincial capital, as well as in each county and city. Collections were to include Chinese, Japanese, English and other European language books, and all people were to be welcome to come and read.[1]

From 1905 to 1911, thousands of new schools were established. In 1905, Hunan Province opened China's first public library. In 1909, the first law for the creation of public libraries was promulgated. It provided for the establishment of the National Library in Peking and for a public library in each of the provincial capitals.[2]

In 1922, a committee of the Chinese Association for the Advancement of Education was established to accelerate the public library movement. One of the resolutions was to invite Dr. Arthur E. Bostwick, an American library expert, to China to make a general survey of Chinese libraries and to prepare a report to be submitted to the Association.[3] The Metropolitan Library was established in Peking in response to the demand for a public library.

In 1927, under the Nationalist Government at Nanking, China for the first time in its history placed the affairs concerning libraries under the direction of the Ministry of Education. After 1949, the National Library in Nanking was moved to Taiwan, its current location, where it is known as the National Central Library ("guoli zhongyang tushuguan"). The Metropolitan Library in Peking (Beijing), subsequently became the National Library of China (NLC).

The National Library of China

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China some thirty years ago, library development has been sporadic. Libraries in contemporary China are organized into seven main types: (1) the National Library; (2) provincial libraries; (3) county and city libraries; (4) reading rooms and popular educational centers; (5) children's and primary school libraries; (6) college and university libraries; (7) specialized and research libraries--which include the National Library, college and university libraries, and various special libraries.

The National Library (NLC), the largest public library in China, is a research library. Although it has existed for only 70 years, its collection dates back some 700 years--having inherited part of the Imperial Library from the Southern Song Dynasty and the Imperial Library of the Ming Dynasty. After its founding in 1910 the library subsumed the collections of the Cabinet Grand Library, the Imperial Academy and the Southern School of the Imperial College of the Qing Dynasty.[4] The

precious wood-block printed and handwritten copies of the "Si Ku Quan Shu" and the manuscripts from the Dunghuang caves are among its most valuable collections.

The present site of the National Library is situated to the west of Beihai Park, and occupies 50,000 square feet. A new building with 140,000 square feet is scheduled to be opened to the public sometime in 1987. Its collection currently has over 1,300,000 volumes, including both periodicals and monographs. The periodicals comprise two-fifths of the collection and there are over thirty-six thousand titles in newspapers. More than half of the 600,000 volumes in the rare book collection have been acquired since 1949.

Since the People's Republic of China, according to its Constitution, is "a unitary multinational state built up jointly by the people of all its nationalities," the National Library of China acquires books in the various national minority languages, including Mongolian, Tibetan, Manchu, Yi, Miao, etc.[5] Altogether there are about 60,000 volumes in 24 different languages in its collection.[6]

In addition to collecting comprehensively on a national scale, the National Library of China also acquires foreign materials as extensively as its budget permits. Its collection has foreign publications in 115 languages, mostly in English, Russian, Japanese, French and German.[7] From 1966 to 1976, the period of the Cultural Revolution, library development in China was seriously undermined. Fortunately, the National Library and

many major academic libraries suffered limited physical loss. Nevertheless, they did lose a ten-year period of critical growth and development.

Since 1979, the National Library of China's Acquisitions Department has vigorously acquired materials from abroad. Among the most wanted items on the list are books published in Taiwan and Hong Kong. All of the major reference materials published in the English language are also very highly sought after. The NLC caters mainly to the central political organizations of the Chinese Communist Party, the government and the army. Additionally, the NLC supports the special needs of scientific research institutions and serves the needs of library card-holders.

To meet the needs of foreigners in Beijing who wish to use the National Library of China for in-library reading or borrowing books, the NLC issues reading cards and borrowing cards upon request. However, since the maximum capacity of the main reading room will hold only 700 people, it is not very easy to obtain a reading card.

Like most of the libraries in the United States, the National Library of China has a cataloging backlog of titles in foreign languages--the NLC's foreign languages cataloging backlog currently runs to 80,000 titles. There is, however, no backlog for Chinese language materials. Apparently, hiring people who have an adequate language background is a problem and one that is not easily remedied; now, more than ever, college graduates with

language proficiency can find better paying jobs working in industries in which capital has been invested by foreign countries. Furthermore, about one-half of the college and university graduates go on to graduate school.

In an effort to give the library personnel proper training, the National Library of China has set up a night school for staff members to improve their skills. In addition, there is a college equivalency program which teaches library-related skills to high school graduates. Even with a program like this, the NLC is still very short of qualified personnel needed to work in the library. Currently, thirty-three full time employees are trying to assume a work-load normally assigned to forty-seven full time employees.

College and University Libraries

In 1982 there were about 715 college and university libraries in the People's Republic of China. The total enrollment of college students was about 1,540,000. Almost all college and university libraries are public institutions supported either by the central government in Beijing or by the provincial and city governments.[8] Academic libraries vary tremendously in size and services, yet they share some common characteristics and face some common problems.

The academic libraries are all operated under rules and regulations issued from Beijing. Among these regulations is the Library Working Regulation of Institutions of Higher Education of the People's Republic of China, which was issued by the Ministry

of Education in 1981. This document states that in an institution of higher education, the library is to be the center for the institution's books and resources, and as a major academic unit, the library is to function as a vital component of the teaching and research process.

Many universities were closed during the ten-year period of the Cultural Revolution. Scholars and librarians were sent to the countryside to do manual labor, and, in turn, their institutions were run by peasants and workers. When college entrance exams were reinstated in 1977, the university libraries were reopened and have since resumed their vital role in the educational process.

Academic libraries are now very crowded. Many libraries are adding, or are planning to add, more space to their existing facilities. Not only do they need more space for their readers, they also need additional space to house both the cataloged materials and the backlog of uncataloged materials..

The libraries are operating under very limited budgets compared to library budgets in the United States. In 1980, the total budget for academic libraries in China was about $26.6 million, or about $40,000 per library. By way of comparison, the Rutgers Library, of the State University of New Jersey, had a budget of $9,293,618 for the 1981-82 academic year.[9]

Many libraries have rare books; the condition of these books, however, is unknown. Only the libraries in the north have heat in the winter and there is virtually no air conditioning in

any library in the summer, therefore many old and rare volumes are probably deteriorating.

The use of academic libraries is extremely high. Reading rooms are filled to capacity during all operating hours. Most libraries have closed stacks and getting a book can sometimes be an extremely frustrating experience. In Beijing University Library, for instance, the library utilizes many youths waiting for permanent job assignment ("dai ye qingnian") as library clerks. Consequently, their motivation is not very high. Oftentimes, without even checking the stacks, they will simply tell a patron that the book is "not available."

During the Cultural Revolution, all colleges and universities were closed. The libraries are open now but there is still about a ten-year gap in the book and periodical collections, especially in the category of Western science and technology.

Unlike the National Library of China, the college and university libraries are comparatively well staffed, although few staff members have formal training in library science. The majority of the library staff were hired after the Cultural Revolution and 56% have had less than 5 years of library experience.[10] The age gap among academic librarians, which is one of the consequences of the Cultural Revolution, is very evident. The staff is made up of only the young and the old; the middle-age group is virtually nonexistent.

Special Libraries

Special libraries are by far the best managed libraries in China today. They operate under a much more adequate budget than the college and university libraries, and are considered as the national key institutions ("guojia zhongdian jigou"). For example, in 1985 the Library of the Academia Sinica purchased 4 Chinese, Korean, Japanese ("CKJ") computer terminals, and in 1987 it expects to join the Research Libraries Group (RLG) network--established in 1974 by Harvard, Yale, Columbia universities, and the New York Public Library.[11] The 12 members of the Academy Sinica's computer automation team are all trained computer science and math majors. Although the library is not fully "on-line," its staff has managed to complete a few "off-line" projects. The automation group also carries out information retrieval services for the Academy Sinica and is compiling indexes for the Academy's collections. The Academy plans to join the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), a computerized system established by the Research Libraries Group (RLG).[12] When the Academy Sinica joins this computerized network sometime in 1987, it will add its notable social science collection to the RLIN data base.

The library of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences is also a very impressive research library. Many of the library staff were trained abroad and received library degrees from colleges and universities accredited by the American Library Association. The leadership of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences recognizes

the quality of the educational experience these foreign trained personnel received and therefore plan to continue to send members of the staff abroad for specialized advanced training. Since the library is operating under a comparatively adequate budget, it can afford to purchase more books and journals. It has acquired more than 40 journals from Taiwan alone covering the subject of agriculture. The reading rooms are brightly illuminated and they have ample space. Staff members are knowledgeable and helpful. A new building, which will have facilities for the foreign experts who will be invited to work at the Academy of Agricultural Sciences, will be opened in 1987.

Conclusion

Libraries in China have experienced positive growth in the past decade, and China's leaders seem to have placed a renewed emphasis on library development. In addition to the construction of new library buildings, there is a frenetic book acquisition policy motivated by a desire to "make-up" for the time lost during the ten-year period of turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. Library science education is also receiving more emphasis. A three to four year program of formal library science training has been reinstated at both Beijing University and Wuhan University, and courses in information science and computer technology are being introduced in various other institutions.[13] More regional and national conferences are being held to encourage information sharing and professional development. The National Librarian Association was also reestablished in 1978. The "Revolutionary

Committees," which had assumed leadership functions during the Cultural Revolution, have been replaced by more professional administrative personnel who are now taking charge of libraries. There is also a consensus that a national cooperative bibliographic network should be established for information sharing.

However, Guangming Ribao acknowledged that "Chinese library work still falls short of demand and is in need of urgent reform," and went on to state that it was imperative for China to establish a national library organization which could coordinate the use and distribution of books and materials, and the application of computer technology to the field of library work.[14]

It should be noted that most of the research libraries have a computer automation department ("dianzi jisuanji zu"). Many of the staff members in these computer automation departments are very well qualified. Beijing University Library, for example, using its computer resources, has compiled a bibliography on foreign language monographs cataloged by ten of China's libraries and institutions. They plan to publish the bibliographies four times a year and hope that more libraries throughout the country will send them copies of the foreign language titles in their respective catalogs. Unfortunately, procedures for inter-library loan are not very well organized; too many rules and regulations prevent the libraries from borrowing from one another. Many libraries take the position that there is little value in knowing

what titles are catalogued by other libraries if they can't use the books in these other libraries.

Without a national library organization, it will be virtually impossible to establish a comprehensive national bibliographic network. Standards for cataloging have to be established before bibliographic data can be entered into a data base. Without a coordinating agent to push for such standards, there can be no national bibliographic network. Most libraries in China today use the Chinese cataloging rules developed by the National Library of China ("zhongtu bian mu fa"), which is good for Chinese language titles but less useful for foreign language publications. However, the libraries of the Academy of Sciences use another system ("kexueyuan bian mu fa"), which is good for scientific material but less useful for general titles. In addition, a good portion of the materials cataloged before 1979 were classified under the Library of Congress classification system, which was designed and developed for English language publications.

It is agreed that library personnel have to improve their professional skills and services. Clearly, more universities need to offer a library science program in their curricula so that more qualified entry-level library staff can meet the personnel demands of the libraries, and more research libraries need to establish programs to upgrade the training of their existing staff. None of these urgently needed improvements will be easily achieved. However, if China's leadership can continue

to recognize the critical role that its libraries play in the drive toward modernization, then even greater emphasis will be given to the expansion, improvement and development of library work. Hopefully, with proper planning and guidance, China's libraries will improve greatly during the next ten years.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Kaiming A. Chiu, "Modern Library Movement in China," Libraries in China, Peiping: Library Association of China, 1935, p. 3.

2. Ibid.

3. Fu-tsung Chiang, "National Libraries in China," Libraries in China, Peiping: Library Association of China, 1935, pp. 92-93.

4. National Library of China: A Short Guide to the National Library of China (Beijing: National Library of China, 1982), p. 9.

5. "Constitution of the People's Republic of China, (December 4, 1982)," Beijing Review, No. 52, December 27, 1982, p. 11.

6. National Library of China: A Short Guide to the National Library, Beijing: National Library of China, 1982, p. 9.

7. Ibid.

8. Thomas Y. Yeh, "A Profile of Academic Libraries in China," College and Research Libraries, November, 1985, p. 499.

9. Weekly Agenda, Rutgers, The State University of New York, September 8, 1986.

10. Thomas Y. Yeh, op. cit., pp. 501-502.

11. The Research Library Group (RLG), established in 1974 by Harvard, Yale, Columbia universities and the New York Public Library, is a corporation owned by major universities and research instutions. The goals of the Research Library Group are: (1) to provide research institutions with a structure of addressing common problems; (2) to provide scholars and researchers with sophisticated access to bibliographic and other forms of information; (3) to enable libraries to manage their catalogs in an automated mode in the context of an automated file of all member collections; and (4) to promote, develop, and operate cooperative programs in collection development, preservation of library materials, and shared access to research materials. Research Libraries Group, Inc. "RLG in Brief," December, 1984, p. 2.

12. In 1978, the Research Library Group (RLG) concluded an agreement with Stanford University whereby Stanford became a member of RLG--transforming RLG from a regional association into a national partnership--and Stanford University became the host institution for the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), the automated information system of RLG. Ibid., p. 3. To achieve bibliographic control of East Asian vernacular material, RLG utilizes a special "CKJ" computer terminal that allows Chinese "characters," Japanese "kana," and Korean "hangul" to be entered into RLIN's computerized bibliographic processing system. Research Libraries Group, Inc., "East Asian Studies," August, 1982, pp. 1-2.

13. "Libraries in China Today," Library Journal, June, 1979, p. 301.

14. "Library Work Needs Reform," Beijing Review, No. 28, July 14, 1986, p. 27.